

# Apichatpong Weerasethakul

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Newman, K. (2009) Persistence of vision. Exhibition held at FACT, Liverpool



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**Karen Newman**

**REF Output Supporting Documentation**

**Apichatpong Weerasethakul  
Primitive**

Curated exhibition featuring specially commissioned  
multi-platform artwork at FACT  
(Foundation for Art and Creative Technology), Liverpool

**24 September – 29 November 2009**

**Exhibition Website:**

<http://www.fact.co.uk/projects/primitive/primitive/>



**Apichatpong Weerasethakul  
Primitive**

**24 September - 29 November 2009**

FACT presents Apichatpong Weerasethakul's first solo exhibition in the UK  
featuring the new multi-platform artwork, *Primitive*.

After researching Apichatpong's (aka Joe to friends) existing works, Newman solicited a proposal from the artist for a new commission and touring exhibition. The following excerpt is taken from the original artist proposal

#### A NOTE ON MODES OF REPRESENTATION:

PRIMITIVE as installation and as film

The PRIMITIVE project consists of a combination of an ambitious installation and a film. I have been working in both fields for the past few years. At the moment, even though both practices deal with moving images, they are still different animals. While an installation is about space and interaction, a film is an immobile dream. In the cinema theater, I am a dictator, a hypnotist with the audiences fixed to their seats. In the installation space I allow them to explore the work in their own path and time. However, I am learning from both kinds of works and I feel more and more the existence of a wall between the two. At the same time it is apparent that this wall is crumbling. It has been blurred recently by the way we (in whatever role we position ourselves: as artists, filmmakers, curators, programmers, collectors, etc.) discuss, consume, present 'film' as 'art' and vice versa. Since PRIMITIVE is about an elimination of physical and non-physical things while we are moving forward, it provides me with an opportunity to raise questions and to deal with this wall, either to raise it higher or to destroy it.

After considering the artists proposal, Newman sent the following email to Simon Field, Apichatpong's producer on 2 December 2008. These excerpts highlight Newman's suggested thinking points and visual references for Apichatpong to consider how the installation could be expanded from screen-based work to offer the audience a deeper reflection on the motivations behind the work.

This email prompted Apichatpong to consider adding sculptural elements and a synchronised lighting system to the installation.

Hey Simon

Great to talk to you too - thanks for finding the time and sorry it didn't work out yesterday.

I'm loving the monkey ghost!

Here's some thoughts and references for possibly approaching installation conversations with Joe. For you to digest and we can discuss next week first.

Writing about Joe's work has made me think through some of the key elements of Joe's work in more depth. Collaboration / light and time / ghosts and reincarnation / love, happiness and emotion / family and friendship / presenting several simultaneous scenarios at the same time / personal experience against shared histories... These are all very strong themes that, when viewing the work, you're immediately confronted with and can feel very powerful. He has an amazing ability to make some of those sensations feel very alive for you - can evoke a mood or feeling - I wonder if he could think through the exhibition space as a way of producing such a feeling or experience as the visitor would get from the screen-based content? For example by using actual objects perhaps to create an installation around the screens? This is just one idea. I mentioned being playful with the lighting / atmosphere eg creating a lightening strike effect in the gallery at certain moments, or using a mist machine (or both) - these may be more complicated to achieve technically - but it's this playing with objects to create a mood that you might also feel in the screens to heighten everything.

Mike Nelson <http://brainloveart.blogspot.com/2003/07/mike-nelson.html> I'm sure you will know well is an interesting artist who manages to pull off really evocative installations that can totally transport you to another world. The monkey ghost made me think of his installation Lionheart (pic below) - we've talked lots about having the spaceship in the gallery, but could it be similarly amazing to have some kind of monkey ghost bedroom or presence in the gallery? I guess this goes with the idea of having 'evidence' of something exciting happening, while also transporting you to another world by confronting you with something strange.



Rakot Tiravanya - another great god of installation, interaction, collaboration, politics. He often leaves evidence of an event in the gallery eg recreated his favourite bar with a pool table from san hose as a gallery install where people could hang out, have a drink & play pool. Also asked another artist to make drawings of political protests. Lots of common ground with Joe's work and as you say they may well know each other (he's based in Chiang Mai).



That thinking is also inspired by the beautiful image that animate have up on their website of the monkey ghost in bed in the house with the pink fabric in the background. Leaving "evidence" in the gallery would also fit with the idea of ghosts that come in and out of all Joe's work, the feeling that something happened / someone was here.

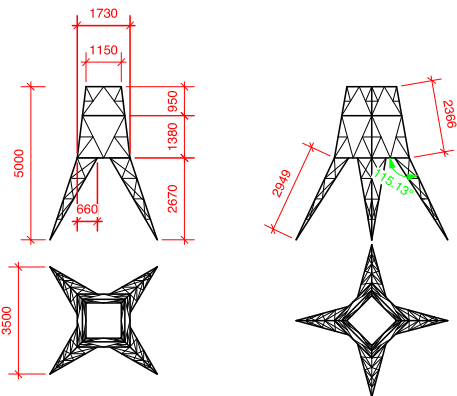


The other film sets are also really beautiful. Not the kind of thing you'd expect to see when you walk into the gallery at FACT. Some kind of re-creation of one of the houses / projecting onto the walls of one of the houses that was used to film? Or the platforms built to shoot from different angles with bits of kit and cameras sitting on them? Could give the sense of collaboration that the crew would have working together to make the piece. Also makes me think how you can be watching Joe's films and all of a sudden be jolted back to reality by being shown an image of the crew actually making the work. Would displace the viewer - stop it being merely a piece of work you can sink into and bring in that questioning of what your seeing, fiction and reality.



I can't remember if you ever saw AI and AI's exhibition but they were very interested in power structures and disrupting the cinema viewing experience. They used chain fencing and a look-out tower onto which the projector sat, used chromakey blue paint to represent the blue screen void - all in all it felt like quite an uncomfortable experience (intentionally).





Newman and Apichatpong developed ideas together for an imposing tower structure that would stand in the space, resembling an electricity pylon. This made a conceptual link to lightning bolts and the use of light in the screen-based work.

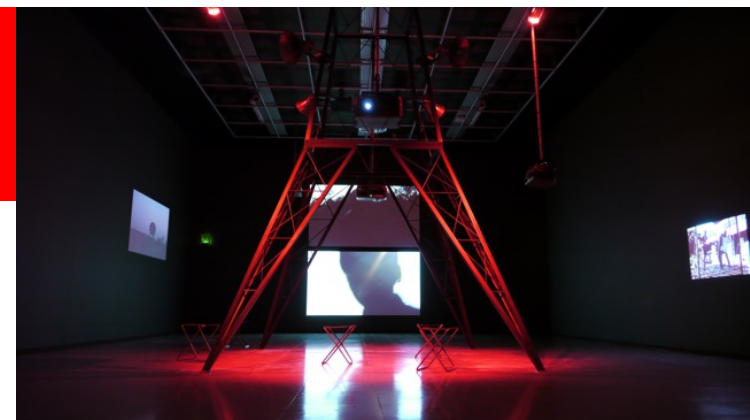
Newman suggested a synchronised lighting system and public address speakers for some of the audio which were connected to the tower, and military-style seating. These additions expanded the artwork from a simple screen-based installation and amplified the political motivations behind the work.

The artists suggestion was to have white walls in the gallery (see bottom left) however Newman persuaded the artist to re-paint the walls black, to reduce light levels in the space and allow the audience to 'sink' into the work, creating a more immersive installation (see final installation photos top, middle and bottom right).



Video documentation of the installation can be seen here:

<http://www.artplayer.tv/video/17/apichatpong-weerasethakul-primitive>





The exhibition was reviewed by national and international press including:

The Guardian

Huffington Post <http://huff.to/l2pJ4l>

Artforum <http://bit.ly/1aMVHeR>

BFI Sight and Sound Magazine

Dazed and Confused

Frieze Magazine

Empire

Design Boom

Electric Sheep Magazine

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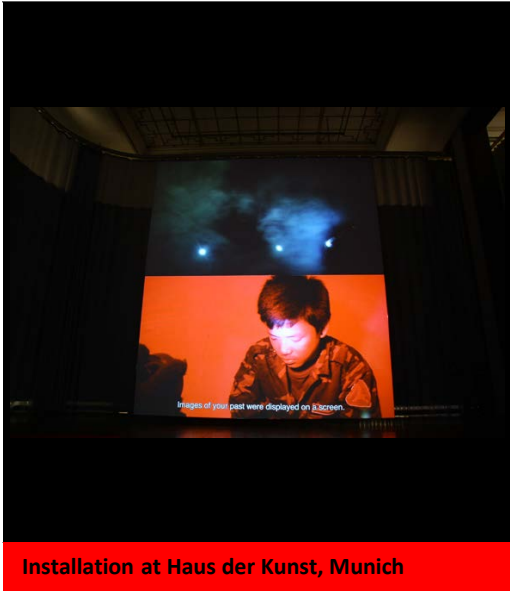
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**Skye Sherwin**  
guardian.co.uk, Friday 25 September 2009 10.31 BST  
[Article history](#)



Lighting up Liverpool ... Thai artist Apichatpong Weerasethakul's video installation at the city's Abandon Normal Devices festival. Photograph: Fact

The Primitive exhibition toured internationally to Haus der Kunst in Munich (20 February – 17 May 2009), Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris (01 October – 03 January 2009), New Museum in New York (19 May – 03 July 2011) and Hangar Biocca in Milan (08 March – 28 April 2013). Newman led the exhibition tour, involving curatorial conversations with venues regarding exhibition design. Due to overlapping schedules and the cost of transport it was not possible to ship the tower, however each installation was adapted to suit the space, incorporating lighting and seating to achieve the desired atmosphere.



Installation at Haus der Kunst, Munich



Installation at New Museum, New York



Installation at Hangar Biocca, Milan

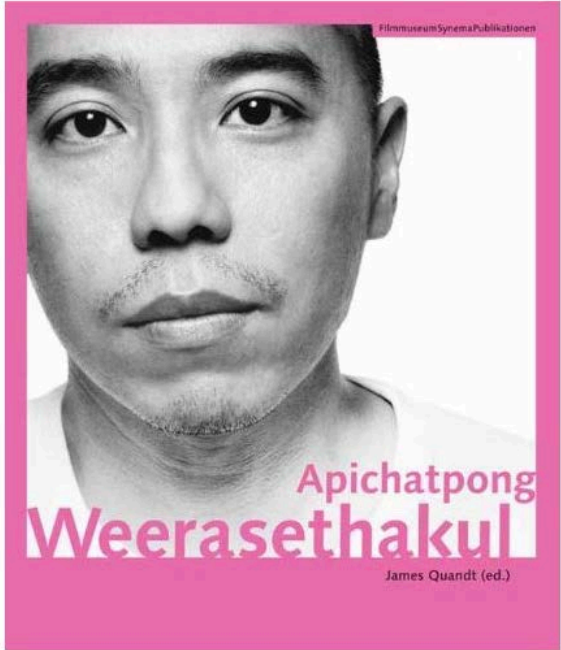


Installation at Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris

Primitive formed key R&D towards Apichatpong's feature film Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives. During Production for Primitive, the artist was able to develop characters and screenplay that was used in the feature film. Uncle Boonmee won the prestigious Palm d'Or Prize at Cannes Film Festival in 2010 and has been screened at cinemas across the world. The Primitive project thus pioneered a new form of practice-based research with multiple outputs, demonstrating how an artwork commissioned for gallery context can evolve into a wider body of work for multiple audiences.



Newman's research was published in the monograph Apichatpong Weerasethakul, published by the Austrian Film Museum (Ed. James Quandt, Wallflower Press, 2009) as well as the printed Exhibition Guide



APICHATPONG WEERASETHAKUL, edited by James Quandt, with essays by Tony Rayns, Karen Newman, Benedict Anderson, Kong Rithdee, James Quandt and Apichatpong. Letters from Mark Cousins, Tilda Swinton: annotated filmography; selected bibliography, biography. Preface by Alexander Horwath (text entirely in English). Vienna: Austrian Film Museum, 2009, 256 pp., 20 euro (paper)